

Robert M.

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A Heckuva Job: How Management Failures Doomed the Bush Administration

Donald P. Moynihan

La Follette School of Public Affairs, University of Wisconsin-Madison

dmoynihan@lafollette.wisc.edu

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Robert M. La Follette School of Public Affairs
1225 Observatory Drive, Madison, Wisconsin 53706

Phone: 608.262.3581 / Fax: 608.265-3233

info@lafollette.wisc.edu / <http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu>

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A Heckuva Job: How Management Failures Doomed the Bush Administration

Rajiv Chandrasekaran. *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone*.

New York: Knopf. ISBN: 1400044871, 2006, 336 pages

Christopher Cooper and Robert Block's *Disaster: Hurricane Katrina and the Failure of Homeland Security*. New York: Times Books. ISBN: 0805081305, 2006, 352 pages.

Barton Gellman. *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency*. New York: Penguin Press.

ISBN: 2008. 1594201862, 2008, 384 pages.

David E. Lewis. *The Politics of Presidential Appointments: Political Control and Bureaucratic Performance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. ISBN:

0691135444, 2008, 312 pages.

Jane Mayer. *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How The War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals*. New York: Doubleday. ISBN: 0385526393, 2008, 400 pages.

James Pfiffner. *Power Play: The Bush Presidency and the Constitution*. Washington

D.C.: Brookings Institution Press. ISBN: 0815770448, 2008, 299 pages

Alasdair Roberts. *The Collapse of Fortress Bush: The Crisis of Authority in American Government*. New York: New York University Press. ISBN: 081477606X, 2008, 304

pages.

Introduction

There was little applause as George W. Bush exited the Presidential stage. His successor as standard-bearer for the Republican Party, John McCain, studiously avoided campaigning with Bush. McCain even began one campaign ad saying "The last eight years have not worked very well, have they?" At the Republican presidential convention in 2008, the only speaker who had kind words for the President was his wife, Laura Bush.

Republicans hoped that Bush would help them build a permanent governing majority. But in his second term Bush set a new low in the history of presidential approval ratings. His presidency was characterized by a series of failures that reinvigorated the Democratic Party, leading to their control of the White House and Congress.

To a great degree, the negative public perceptions of Bush are driven by his management failures. As support eroded for the President's signature policy, the invasion of Iraq, the war's defenders made the case that the problem was not with the decision to invade, but the mismanagement of the occupation. The inability of the federal government to provide basic safety for its citizens during Hurricane Katrina signaled the start of a gradual erosion of confidence in President Bush. A poll in March 2006 found that the trait that the public most closely associated with Bush was "incompetent."

A Focus on Management

The history of management in the Bush administration is replete with ironies. One such irony is despite the record of failure, few Presidential administrations have devoted as much high-level attention to management issues. In August of 2001 the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released *The President's Management Agenda*, which outlined five major areas of focus: increased competitive sourcing; improved financial performance by removing fraud and waste, and better financial

reporting; expanding e-government; the integration of budget and performance information; and strategically managing human capital.

The changes proposed in the President's Management Agenda had their critics, but they were reasonable efforts to deal with real problems. The OMB gave these issues sustained attention, monitoring progress in each area for all government agencies.

But the proposals became entangled in stakeholder, partisan and institutional disagreements. Federal employee unions believed Bush was intent on reducing both the number of federal positions, as well as the protections for those positions, such as the right to bargain. They successfully lobbied Congress to limit the scope of competitive sourcing efforts, and to make the terms more favorable for federal employees.

After 9/11, Bush used the issue of homeland security to scrap large sections of the civil service system. Without managerial freedom, the President claimed that he would be hampered in his ability to defend the country. The White House had previously proposed detailed and well-reasoned legislation for a new personnel system. These proposals failed. Bush then used the legislation that created the Department of Homeland Security to empower the Secretary of the department to design a new personnel system without offering any guidance as to what that system would look like. Similar power was given to the Secretary of Defense. But when the new personnel systems were proposed, unions used a mixture of litigation and new legislation to delay and limit changes, while restoring many traditional employee protections.

The battle over personnel issues effectively eliminated the potential for a middle ground on management issues. Public sector unions and Democrats viewed any proposed changes from the White House with deep suspicion. The most significant management innovation of the OMB, the Program Assessment Rating Tool, suffered as a result. Over five years, the OMB used the tool to evaluate the effectiveness of virtually all federal programs in unprecedented detail. But the Program Assessment Tool became viewed as a White House contrivance. Congress ignored its recommendations and rejected efforts to mandate it.

The Cheney Effect

The potential impact of the President's Management Agenda was weakened amid the perception that it was being pursued in an ideological fashion. In some ways, this reflects the mixture of serious management credentials and ideological beliefs that characterized the Bush administration. Bush arrived as the first President with an MBA. Many of his top appointees were highly-regarded as managers. Treasury Secretary Paul O' Neill had plenty of government experience and was the subject of a Kennedy School case study for his management in the private sector. He would be forced to resign in the first term, and subsequently criticized the White House as run by ideologues and lacking a coherent policy-making process.

Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, was one of the highly regarded executives that Graham Allison relied on when he wrote his seminal paper on public and private differences. Rumsfeld's managerial acumen was respected enough that "Rumsfeld's Rules", a list of aphorisms on management, remains in wide circulation (some examples: "Strive to preserve and enhance the integrity of the office of the presidency. Pledge to leave it stronger than when you came"; "It is easier to get into

something than to get out of it;” “The country cannot afford amateur hour in the White House.”)

Vice-President Cheney was well-regarded as both Chief of Staff under President Ford, and as Secretary of Defense under the George H.W. Bush administration. Partly because Cheney was so skilled at not leaving his fingerprints on major initiatives, it is only now that we are gaining a full understanding of his extraordinary influence, detailed by Barton Gellman’s *The Angler*, and Jane Mayer’s *The Dark Side*.

In both books, Cheney is portrayed as a master of bureaucracies. He understood how they worked, and how to make them provide the results he wanted. He placed appointees who were ideologically compatible and personally loyal to him in key positions throughout government. While many in the White House disagreed with him, they knew that Cheney had extraordinary influence with the President and were wary of his reputation for ending the careers of those who crossed him.

Cheney’s legal team led the efforts to allow what was euphemistically referred to as enhanced interrogation techniques of prisoners. He managed the flow of information to and from the President. A presidential order that stripped enemy combatants of access to the courts was hand-delivered by Cheney to President Bush, bypassing normal staff review. The Secretary of State and National Security Advisor found out about the order only when it was reported on CNN. Indeed, one of the ironies of Cheney’s role is that even as he sought to enhance the authority of the President, it remained unclear to many in the White House the degree to which the President was really making the key decisions.

Cheney skillfully used leaks to build the case for the Iraq war and to undermine rivals such as George Tenet, the head of the CIA, and Secretary of State Colin Powell. Frustrated that the CIA was not providing evidence of Iraqi involvement in 9/11, Cheney and Rumsfeld created an office at the Pentagon that would develop their own intelligence. This office relied on questionable sources and came to conclusions that the CIA rejected, but had a clear line to the Vice President’s Office, who in turn provided this information to President Bush and leaked it to the media. In public Cheney would point to the resulting media reports to justify a more aggressive approach.

Cheney achieved his goals in the short-run, but in doing so undermined the long-run legitimacy and effectiveness of the administration. His great gifts as a manager were undone by a refusal to compromise, a penchant for secrecy, a tendency to alienate key actors, and a remarkable reliance on wishful thinking that was underlined by a willingness to ignore expert advice. The application of aggressive psychological and physical interrogation techniques drew from Department of Defense knowledge of practices used by communists in the Korean and Vietnamese wars. Such tactics were designed not to deliver actionable intelligence, but to elicit false confession for propaganda purposes. Experienced interrogators viewed them as unreliable. This fact did not stop their use in Guantanamo and elsewhere. Cheney’s legal staff was warned by administration lawyers that much of what they were doing would be ruled to be illegal or unconstitutional, but proceeded anyway. The Supreme Court subsequently stripped away much of the legal framework of the war on terror. Cheney and his loyalists ignored the advice of the State Department, think-tanks and even within the Pentagon that the Iraq war had the potential to become a quagmire and administrative nightmare, with tragic results.

Iraq

Rajiv Chandrasekaran's, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, argues that regardless of the debate about whether going into Iraq, once the US did decide to invade, its long-term success would be largely determined by the quality of post-invasion administration. While the counter-factual – that careful planning, good decision making, recruitment of capable administrators would have led to a much better situation in Iraq – cannot be proved, Chandrasekaran shows how the absence of these qualities were directly related to the growing insecurity in Iraq, and growing disillusionment with the US presence.

It is difficult to think of any policy area for the Bush White House where as much depended on competent administration, or where the costs of incompetence were so great. It is also true that there is no other policy area where the Bush Administration enjoyed so great an autonomy over management issues. The occupying body, the Coalitional Provisional Authority (CPA) was not subject to civil service rules and Congress exercised no real oversight. This was the area where management mattered most, and where managers had greatest freedom.

The Bush administration presided over a series of almost bafflingly bad management decisions. One of the most basic was the failure to plan for a post-invasion Iraq. It is not that such plans did not exist. The State Department had developed a detailed Future of Iraq project, but State Department officials were systematically excluded from positions in Iraq by Rumsfeld because they were not viewed as sufficiently loyal to President Bush.

The planners that Rumsfeld did rely on, the Office of Special Plans, was led by Douglas Feith, who had also led effort that provided the faulty intelligence that justified the war (and was memorably characterized by General Tommy Franks as “the dumbest fucking guy on the planet.”) Feith's office did not coordinate with the State Department, the CIA, or post-reconstruction officials in the Department of Defense. Unrealistic assumptions went unquestioned. Decisions that would fundamentally and negatively alter the trajectory of post-invasion Iraqi society were taken with little consultation. For example, the deBaathification of large swathes of the Iraqi bureaucracy and the dissolution of the Army incapacitated two of the last functioning institutions in Iraqi society that could have provided a force for stability.

The occupation was also marked by a preference for political loyalty rather than expertise and relevant knowledge. Many of the staffers in the CPA were young and untested, and whose main qualification was involvement in Republican causes. Even the more seasoned appointees had little experience in the area where they had responsibility, and in some cases displaced better qualified candidates. Political loyalty was an unspoken norm at the CPA. It was inappropriate to do anything other than praise the mission and the President. “Bush-Cheney 2004” campaign t-shirts were ubiquitous. One of the few Democrats at the CPA compared his status to being gay in small town America: “If you know what's good for you, you stay in the closet” (Chandrasekaran 2006, p82).

Loyalty did not prove to be an adequate substitute for expertise. CPA officials approached governance as if they were still in the United States, believing that their role was to outline broad policy goals, which someone else would then implement. When a 24 year old real estate agent who was put in charge of the reorganizing the Iraqi stock

market mentioned his lack of qualifications, he was told “your job is to be the project manager. Your job is to get other people to get things done and contract jobs out. You will just be the main point of contact” (Chandrasekaran 2006, p97). The trouble was that there was no cadre of competent bureaucrats to deal with the messy job of implementation, and the quality of contractor work was variable. Simply changing the laws, or redesigning institutions, did little since new laws were ignored or abandoned.

CPA officials rarely traveled outside their Green Zone headquarters, and had little sense of what was happening. The Green Zone itself was run to resemble a US suburb. CPA officials ate American food, and did not experience the increasing chaos outside the walls of the Green Zone. They heard about a declining security situation from TV as they worked on ambitious and unrealistic projects. In some cases the policy goals pursued by the CPA were so disconnected with the real world of Iraq as to fall into the realm of fantasy. The official in charge of health administration focused not on rebuilding a decimated health-care system, but on privatization and an anti-smoking campaign. CPA officials consistently sought ways to reduce state influence and foster market solutions, even as Iraqi society was splintering and most citizens cared more about more basic issues such as safety, and access to medicine, water, and electricity.

Hurricane Katrina

In the botched federal response to Hurricane Katrina, many of the same tendencies that undercut the rebuilding of Iraq were present, including an emphasis on political loyalty over competence, and a focus on the war on terror that failed to incorporate other forms of risks. What was different about Katrina, however, was that the negative consequences of these tendencies were immediate and unambiguous. There was no way to hide what was going on, no long-term promise that things would get better, and no way to impugn the patriotism of those who questioned the failures of the administration.

Christopher Cooper and Robert Block’s *Disaster: Hurricane Katrina and the Failure of Homeland Security* remains the best account of what happened. They document the chaos and confusion of the actual response, and trace much of this to the management decisions of the Bush administration. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had been reinvented under the Clinton administration, rebuilding its reputation under energetic and competent leadership. Under President Bush FEMA underwent a slow motion collapse. It was led by political appointees long on campaign experience and short on emergency credentials. The poster-child was Michael Brown, the FEMA administrator who was told he was doing a “heckuva job” by President Bush days before he was asked to resign.

One of the strengths of *Disaster* is that it is not satisfied with a conventional wisdom that scapegoated Brown, but probes further into why the federal response failed. In 2002, FEMA was moved into the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and in the process lost political access and resources. Some of these cuts directly affected crisis response capacity. Grant-making responsibilities were removed from FEMA, eliminating the central means by it communicated priorities and built relationships with state and local responders. FEMA lost resources that would have allowed a follow-up to the Hurricane Pam simulation that modeled what would actually happen in Katrina with startling accuracy. And many key positions among FEMA staff were simply not filled.

Brown argued that weakening FEMA and focusing primarily on terror was undercutting the ability to respond to natural disasters. This echoed the perspective of career staff, and state and local emergency responders. Brown made the right arguments, but was not listened to, in part because he lacked credibility among senior DHS appointees, and in part because they were convinced that they knew better. At the same time many of the most experienced career staff in FEMA were leaving, demoralized with the decline of their agency. When Katrina struck, the lack of experienced employees weakened the response.

The response was also undermined by post 9/11 crisis response policies. New policies created confusion as to how new responder roles related to one another and who was in charge. The new policies also identified that certain types of crises should be designated as incidents of national significance, thereby motivating a more aggressive federal response than offered for more routine disasters. But because Katrina was not a terrorist event, DHS officials were slow to recognize it as an incident of national significance, delaying the deployment of federal resources. The inertia of the DHS was compounded by the fact that President Bush was at his Texas ranch until two days after landfall, enjoying the longest break away from Washington of any President for decades. His aides argued that communications technology allowed the President to oversee the response, but transcripts of teleconference meetings reveal Bush as disengaged, failing to ask questions and offering little other than broad words of encouragement.

Katrina brought another unpleasant irony for Bush. He was determined to avoid repeating his father's failed reelection bid in 1992. But a key reason why the elder Bush had lost was because of a bungled FEMA response to Hurricane Andrew in 1992. At this time FEMA had become known as a "turkey farm" to stash away incompetent appointees. The younger Bush repeated the same mistake as his father, with even more dismal results. Had Katrina occurred before the 2004 election, the electoral outcomes would likely also have been the same.

The Causes and Consequences of Politicization

Thus far, the books discussed are among the best examples of a glut of investigative journalism that has appeared during the second term of the Bush administration. The default mode of the Bush administration has been to maintain secrecy, and it has required the skills of investigative reporting to uncover many of the actual management practices of this White House.

Where is public administration scholarship in all of this? Until recently there have been no penetrating analyses of the Bush years. Doubtless, the future will bring more, but in 2008 three scholars offered different and insightful perspectives. While sometimes lacking the immediacy of investigative reporting, each book uses a broader historical context to develop useful analytical frameworks to understand the presidency.

In *The Politics of Presidential Appointments*, David Lewis examines patterns of presidential politicization from 1960-2004. In doing so he offers the most thorough empirical analysis of political appointees to date, providing convincing evidence on the key causes and consequences of politicization.

Lewis shows that politicization is more likely to occur under certain conditions: as a tool of control when there is a policy divergence between the President and the agency; when Congress shares the policy goals of the President and is therefore unlikely to

challenge politicization; and where agency tasks are simple enough so that political appointees will not dramatically reduce performance.

Politicization is also used for patronage purposes, to reward those who are politically connected, and who have contributed time and resources to campaigning. Less qualified patronage appointees have historically been kept from important tasks. This seems like a reassuring limit on the negative effects of politicization, but the Bush administration gave many young inexperienced officials significant responsibility (e.g., in the CPA and the Department of Justice), where their lack of competence, ignorance of policy and government rules, and ideological zeal resulted in poor performance and occasional illegality. In short, the Bush administration often blurred the line between patronage and policy positions.

Lewis also details the effects of politicization on performance. Politicization tends to reduce agency morale, foster turnover, and make recruitment harder. The short-term tenure of appointees and their lack of relevant experience undercuts agency performance. Lewis shows that programs headed by career officials receive better program evaluation scores during the Bush years than those headed by appointees.

Lewis is convincing in large part because he brings sophisticated quantitative evidence to an issue that had previously been dominated by case studies. To employ such an approach demands a measure of politicization, and Lewis uses the number of political appointees.

However, there is a danger that this measure simplifies politicization. For example, Lewis (2008 101, 203) suggests that because Democrats and Republicans have had similar number of political appointees, both are engaged in equivalent levels of politicization. But the number of appointees does not reflect how aggressively appointees assert political values. Two presidents could have similar number of appointees, but one set of appointees could pursue politicization much more than the other.

Case evidence suggests that conservative appointees tend to be more suspicious of bureaucracy and more willing to use creative tactics to pursue politicization. Lewis points to cases during the Bush administration where career officials were excluded from decisions, transferred to undesirable jobs and locations, or saw their advice ignored for clearly ideological reasons. Bush's Department of Justice saw appointees illegally using political loyalty tests to shape the selection and promotion of career positions.

Agencies can also be politicized from appointees outside of the organization, as demonstrated by White House staff rewriting climate change reports prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency. Such sub rosa tactics are aspects of politicization not captured by the sheer number of appointees, requiring the type of fine-grained qualitative analysis that as Lewis himself demonstrates in his excellent chapter on the politicization on FEMA.

The Attack on the Constitution

Many have argued that the Bush administration has tried to expand executive power in ways at odds with constitutional values. James Pfiffner's *Power Play* takes this argument seriously, reviewing the evolution of political thought and English constitutional law that shaped the beliefs of the framers of the US constitution. Pfiffner's primary argument is not that Bush managed poorly, though he does suggest that the

negative unanticipated consequences of his decisions overwhelm any possible benefit. Instead he argues that Bush failed to respect proper constitutional boundaries, asserting unilateral executive authority over decisions where the Constitution provides for judicial and/or legislative prerogatives. In this respect, Pfiffner's contribution fits within the administrative law rather than management tradition.

Pfiffner concentrates his focus to the war on terror, where the Bush administration sought to suspend constitutional rights such as habeas corpus to enemy combatants, suspended aspects of the Geneva convention that banned torture, and placed Americans under surveillance without a warrant. In each case the Bush administration acted without consulting other branches of government, or making a public argument about why such authority was needed. They would have to make such arguments eventually, and indeed would gain legislative authority for some aspects of the new policies, but this occurred only after leaks, investigative reporting and scandals such as Abu Gharib exposed what was going on.

In other ways, the Bush administration was more explicit in its expansion of executive authority. President Bush greatly expanded the use of signing statements that interpreted newly-passed laws. Bush frequently ignored aspects of a law that he considered invalid intrusions on his executive authority. These statements were therefore used to confer a quasi-legislative power on the executive branch, an irony for a President who had criticized activist judges who usurp legislative power by overturning legislative intent.

Some in the Bush administration relied on a theory of a unitary executive that argues that the constitution provides the President with significant powers, especially during wartime. The unitary executive theory is at the margins of constitutional scholarship, but has proved useful for the White House, and fits well with the beliefs of Cheney and others that the presidency was severely weakened in the post-Nixon years. Pfiffner's careful analysis offers a sharp rebuke to the theory of the unitary executive, demonstrating that the founders were opposed to broad-ranging executive power, and worried that a press for security would be used to enfeeble other branches.

A Creature of Context

Alasdair Roberts' *The Collapse of Fortress Bush* runs contrary to much of the received wisdom about the Bush administration. Roberts argues that the Bush administration stumbled in its use of executive authority largely because the president is very much a constrained actor. Efforts to develop executive authority to meet the needs of a post-9/11 era faced a series of institutional barriers that saw the White House failing to make difficult choices, and pursuing an agenda of change in secret.

Roberts details the post-Nixonian constraints on the presidency, including stronger freedom of information requirements, protection of whistleblowers, inspectors generals placed within agencies, and the provision of greater administrative capacity in the legislature. Elites within government, both appointees and career staff, now demonstrate less loyalty to the President than in the past. By law and convention dissent has been legitimized. Changes in communications technology has fostered leaking and the spread of critical information.

Resource constraints also hamper the president. A growing majority of the federal budget goes to mandatory entitlement spending, limiting the ability of any

president to pursue an ambitious agenda. A final constraint is what Roberts calls the neoliberal settlement. Since President Reagan both Democrats and Republicans have demonstrated an unwillingness to constrain the market, weakening the capacity of government to intervene. The growing complexity of global corporations makes them more difficult to regulate, and their growing power is reflected in lobbying efforts to limit regulation.

As a result of these constraints, Roberts argues that Bush did not exert authority in many areas that would meaningfully improve security, e.g. reforming taxes or entitlement to properly fund homeland security, regulating private infrastructure and trade more forcefully, remodeling federal oversight, fostering interagency coordination, expanding surveillance or preventative detention.

The debate over civil liberties reveals the constrained Presidency. Critics of Bush argue that he has trampled civil liberties in the name of security. Roberts argues that these claims were overstated. Threats to civil liberties were met by a strong coalition of advocacy groups and a suspicious legislature. The only group to see a significant loss of rights were noncitizens. While the treatment of noncitizens was in many ways deplorable, Roberts points out that it was enabled because of the indifference of most Americans. The greatest threat that citizens faced was a loss of privacy from surveillance and data-mining, a threat created largely because of technological advances, rather than conferred power. Even here, groups such as the American Civil Liberties Unions and librarians mobilized, and the Bush administration pursued many of its surveillance operations in secret because they believed they would not find legislative or public support. This is a break with past conflicts, when citizens lost fundamental liberties, and were often imprisoned for little more than being perceived as unpatriotic.

Roberts argues that 9/11 did not, in fact, change everything. The Bush administration tried to use the event to expand presidential authority, but was swimming against a 30-year tide in the other direction. In doing so, Bush created another irony: efforts to expand executive power may lead to its diminution. Roberts points out that many of the post 9/11 powers were not institutionalized through law or popular acceptance, and are therefore unlikely to be enduring. The perception of an imperial presidency has also invited a backlash of legislative oversight and constraints.

In focusing on institutional constraints, Roberts perhaps underestimates the degree to which the Bush administration did exert authority in meaningful ways. Pfiffner lays out such a case with respect to constitutional values. It is also true that resource limitations for US governments are fostered by public support for tax cuts, but the passage of such cuts were determined by strong Presidential advocacy. It may also be that the neoliberal consensus that has limited the regulation of private power is fraying. The global financial crisis has led both political parties to sing the hymn of regulation, and Bush has intervened in the economy in ways that would have been denounced as socialism until recently.

These criticisms aside, Roberts' focus on the institutional environment in which Bush operated is insightful. Some will find it reassuring that no single President can overcome his constraints to unilaterally and fundamentally change American governance. But Roberts warns that when fundamental change is needed, it is not clear where it will come from. President Obama, like President Bush, lacks the authority to act in key aspects of contemporary governance. Roberts concludes that we must talk seriously

about what powers Presidents need and how this authority will be regulated in a post 9/11 world. But the distrust of executive authority created by the Bush administration will cast a shadow on any such conversation.

Conclusion

It might be argued that Bush's failure to manage arose an overzealous yet well-intentioned desire to keep the country safe. In the aftermath of 9/11 he keenly felt the pressure to prevent another attack. Both Bush and Cheney looked daily at raw intelligence reports of potential threats. Mayer suggests that this collage of unverified dangers altered the worldview of principals at the White House, and clouded their judgment about what constituted an appropriate response.

But it is also true that the war on terror was used to pursue preexisting goals such as a unitary executive, the Iraq war, and weakening public sector unions. And it was pursued in a fashion that was often incompetent. The overt antagonism of the administration toward career experts, and preference for loyalty over other qualifications, undermined the ability of the administration to implement its policies. As a result, a post-9/11 sense of national unity quickly gave way to a bitter partisan divide and a loss of trust in the White House.

How did this happen? The failure to manage can be traced at least in part to the evolution of conservatism in the United States. The revitalization of conservatism in the 1960s was led by intellectuals who challenged the status quo. But in recent years Republicans have turned "elite" into a pejorative term. This elitism is defined not in terms of financial power or social class, but in a fashion that treats learning and expertise with suspicion. Republicans came to believe that governing involves gut decisions. Expertise was treated as a secondary consideration. This tendency was hardened by a suspicion of bureaucratic institutions and civil servants. Speaking truth to power became disloyalty. Questioning ideological beliefs was treated akin to partisan opposition.

Ultimately, a party and a movement rests on its ideas. For those ideas to have merit, they need an intellectual framework that is credible and capable of adapting to changing circumstances. For those ideas to be sustained, they require competent governance. The Bush administration saw the collapse of both.

Bush leaves behind a conservative movement and federal bureaucracy that have much in common: they are unpopular, demoralized and bedraggled. What next? Perhaps Republicans have realized that it is difficult to attack and denigrate government and expertise on the campaign trail, and then actually run a competent government. But it is just as easy to imagine a scenario where bureaucratic failure has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The incompetence of the Bush administration has further reduced faith in the government. In a presidency filled with bitter ironies, Bush's greatest unintended achievement may have been to win new converts to the belief that government is the cause of our problems, and not the solution to them.

Donald P. Moynihan, University of Wisconsin-Madison